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greater. The British and American ambassadors continued to urge moderation upon Burnham and suggested possibilities for a compromise solution. Great Britain finally sent a special representative to impress upon Guyana the dangers and foolishness of an armed conflict.

Negotiated settlement now possible. These pressures finally bore fruit. Burnham softened his position substantially and on March 21 offered the Dutch a counterproposal. He suggested that Guyana would withdraw its security forces (but not civilians) in response to the withdrawal of all Surinamese personnel. Both nations would complete the evacuation by April 1. If the Dutch accept this suggestion, representatives of both parties will meet in a neutral location (which the US, taking no position on the border dispute, has agreed to provide) to prepare for resumption of the negotiations begun in April 1966, to examine the bases for removal of all security forces from the border, and to discuss arrangements whereby civilians of each side can remain in the other's territory. In effect, Burnham has withdrawn his demand that the Netherlands publicly acknowledge the superiority of Guyana's claim and he has proposed discussions leading to formal negotiations.

The Netherlands has been critical of Burnham's proposal in its present form, particularly in regard to the timing of the security forces' withdrawal from the disputed area. Additional difficult discussions will hopefully produce a mutually acceptable formula. In the meantime, Burnham is unlikely to initiate a conflict by ordering the Guyana Defense Force to move against the Surinamese.

Bilateral negotiations over a final settlement of the boundary dispute will probably drag on interminably. The issue has become too entwined with internal politics to permit an easy solution based on bilateral interpretations of legal agreements. Arbitration by a neutral third party is likely to be the only means of eventually terminating the dispute, but no definite steps have been taken in this direction. But while direct and indirect discussions continue the chance of a deliberate violent outbreak is slight.

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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DIRECTOR OF INTELLIGENCE AND RESEARCH

*Research
Memorandum*

INR-5, March 29, 1968

To : The Secretary
Thru : S/S
From : INR - Thomas L. Hughes *Thomas L. Hughes*

Subject: Violence Apparently Averted in Guyana-Surinam Border Dispute

The festering Guyana-Surinam border dispute recently led the two countries to the brink of an armed conflict. Difficult diplomatic maneuvers, encouraged by the UK and, especially in Guyana, with US support, have apparently reduced the likelihood of violence in the near future. This paper discusses the origins of the dispute, the recent flare-up, and prospects for a solution.

ABSTRACT

The dormant Guyana-Surinam border dispute sprang to life in December 1967 when Guyanese police forces ejected a Surinam hydrographic team from the contested area. Surinam Prime Minister Pengel reacted violently, threatening drastic reprisals and the use of force in defense of Surinamese interests. Although his pronouncements exceeded his actions, Pengel did expel a small number of Guyanese from Surinam and established at least two police posts in the disputed region. Guyana Prime Minister Burnham, in turn, became incensed and ordered his military forces to prepare to expel the Surinamese police. Burnham seemed prepared to use arms in support of Guyana's territorial claim.

The Netherlands, which has constitutional responsibility for Surinam's foreign relations and defense, initially took a surprisingly calm view of the

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entire affair. Stimulated by Surinam's aggressive stance, however, it suggested negotiation of the issue. Prime Minister Burnham received the Dutch proposal with considerable distaste because it failed to acknowledge the alleged superiority of Guyana's territorial claim. Urged by Britain and the US to take a moderate position, Burnham made a counterproposal in which he eased considerably his pre-conditions for negotiation. Surinam and the Netherlands probably will not accept Burnham's offer in its present form, but they are likely to use it as the basis for further pre-negotiation discussions. Neither party is likely to employ armed force as long as serious attempts to find a peaceful solution continue.

Guyana bases its claim to the 6,000 square mile contested area on historical precedents. Great Britain exercised a tenuous sovereignty over the region since the mid-nineteenth century. The Netherlands (Surinam) claim is based on geographic considerations--the question of what river forms the major affluent of the Courantyne River, and therefore the border. In 1939, Great Britain and the Netherlands negotiated a treaty which would have given the disputed area to what was then British Guyana. The treaty was never signed because of the interruption of World War II. Following the war, the Netherlands refused to accept the treaty because of Surinamese pressures. The border question has thus remained to poison Guyana-Surinam relations.

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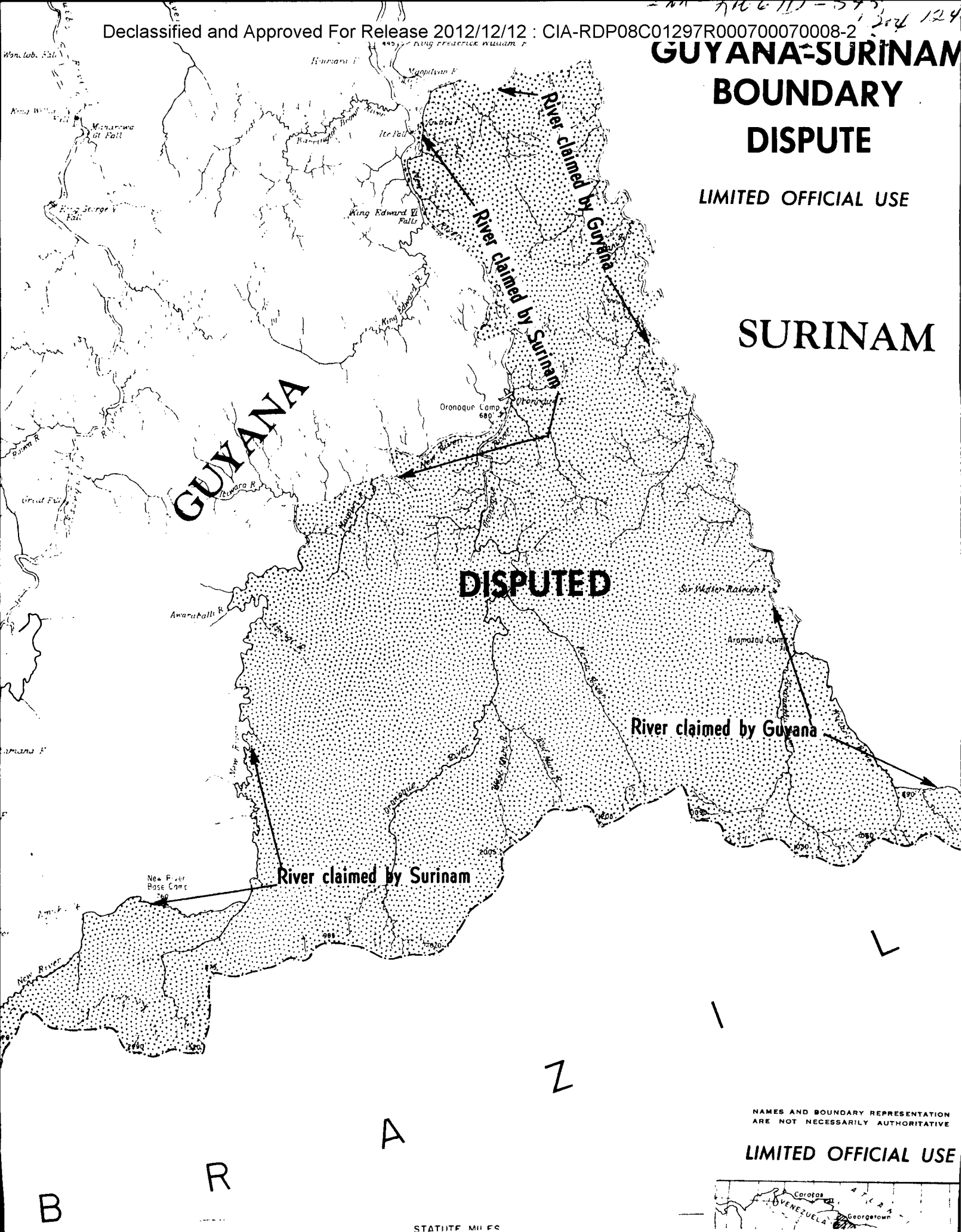
Bilateral negotiations are unlikely to produce a final solution to the dispute, but they would help in defusing the current crisis. Although the remote and uninhabited jungle area has no known value, national pride has become deeply enmeshed in the issue. The US takes no position on the issue other than that it should be settled by peaceful means. The use of a neutral arbiter would probably be the only way of eventually reaching an acceptable settlement, but no definite steps have been taken in this direction.

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GUYANA-SURINAM BOUNDARY DISPUTE

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

SURINAM



NAMES AND BOUNDARY REPRESENTATION
ARE NOT NECESSARILY AUTHORITY

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

STATUTE MILES

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A festering border dispute between Guyana and Surinam that took a sudden turn toward violence last December now seems to be moving toward a peaceful, though perhaps temporary, settlement. The dispute, involving sovereignty over almost 6,000 square miles of uninhabited jungle, stems from the absence of a definite delineation of the interior boundary between the two countries. Both nations agree that their border is formed by the left bank of the Courantyne River. The question is whether the Kutari River or the more western New River constitutes the headwaters of the Courantyne. The disputed area has no particular value, but national pride has become deeply involved in the issue.

The claims. Guyana, basing its claim on historical precedents, insists that the Kutari forms the Courantyne's source. Great Britain exercised sovereignty over the area between the Kutari and New River since the mid-nineteenth century as the result of a tacit agreement with the Netherlands. In return, Great Britain recognized the left bank of the Courantyne, rather than the customary middle of the river, as the Guyana-Surinam boundary. The Netherlands claim to the area is based on the late discovery of the New River, which geographical evidence indicates is the principal affluent of the Courantyne. In 1939, the Netherlands and Great Britain negotiated a treaty which would have delimited the boundary along the Courantyne and Kutari rivers. World War II, however, prevented the two nations from formally approving the treaty.

After World War II the Kingdom of the Netherlands was radically reorganized. The colonies became "associated" entities within the Kingdom. The Hague retained constitutional responsibility for foreign affairs and defense but, at the same time, committed itself to consider local opinions in actions affecting the overseas areas. Under this new organization, Surinam refused to surrender its claim and pressed the Netherlands into supporting its demand for the New River as the boundary.

Several attempts were made to resolve the issue before Guyana gained its independence, at a time when both parties to the dispute still displayed considerable flexibility. Guyanese Prime Minister Burnham visited Paramaribo in January 1966 for discussions with his Surinamese counterpart, Prime Minister Pengel, but they agreed merely to continue their discussions at a later date. Dutch and British representatives discussed the issue again in April 1966, but without achieving an agreement. Thus Guyana gained its independence the following month without any real progress having been made on the boundary dispute. Another attempt in June 1966 to resolve the dispute was as futile as all the earlier efforts.

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Crisis breaks out. The issue remained dormant until December 1967, when Guyana ejected a Surinamese hydrographic team that had been conducting gauging operations in the contested area. No clear explanation has been provided as to why Guyana chose that particular time to expel the Surinamese. Burnham possibly wished to demonstrate his displeasure over Prime Minister Pengel's visit to Venezuela, which claims more than half of Guyana's present territory. One can also speculate that Burnham, expecting a mild Surinamese response acted to strengthen his internal position by adopting a nationalistic pose. It is even conceivable, though improbable, that the Guyanese had just come to appreciate the importance of the gauging operations and decided to act immediately.

Surinam reacted violently to the ejection of its hydrographic team. In a series of radio broadcasts and communiques, Prime Minister Pengel threatened to take strong reprisals and to use armed force to protect Surinamese interests in the disputed area. Despite these threats, Surinam did little more than expel a small number of Guyanese workers who, it alleged, were in the country illegally. Pengel did, however, organize a paramilitary force of civilian "volunteers" and established at least two police posts within the contested territory.

Surinamese leader's internal problems. Pengel's actions during the current crisis have been designed to satisfy his internal political needs as well as to assert Surinam's boundary claim. His coalition government won a relatively easy victory in the 1967 parliamentary elections and apparently is internally stable, but the border dispute poses a serious potential problem. In all his actions, Pengel must take into account the racial divisions which dominate Surinamese politics, the presence of a small but vociferous group that favors full independence, and the large "Hindustani" opposition party. The Prime Minister no doubt felt it necessary to maintain a strong nationalist, patriotic stance on the border issue to prevent a possible erosion of his domestic political position and possibly to increase his ability to gain greater independence of action from the Dutch. Although Surinamese public opinion has generally favored negotiation rather than force to settle the border dispute, it has held Guyana responsible for precipitating the crisis. Pengel, who is first and foremost a politician, probably felt it necessary to carry out his interpretation of the demands of public sentiment in order to insure his political position.

Guyanese leader faces election. Prime Minister Burnham of Guyana, meanwhile, has been under greater internal pressure than his Surinamese counterpart. Sometime during the next twelve months Burnham must hold national elections in which opposition leader Cheddi Jagan will pose a

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very strong challenge. Burnham fears that indecisive action on the border question, particularly if the presence of Surinamese security forces in the disputed area becomes public knowledge, would expose him to damaging criticism by Jagan. Guyana's boundary dispute with Venezuela is another important reason for Burnham to take a firm position. The Guyanese feel hemmed in by the boundary dispute with their two neighbors. Pengel's visit to Venezuela late last year and Venezuelan Foreign Minister Iribarren's recent visit to Surinam aroused Burnham's suspicion that the two countries were collaborating against Guyana, thereby heightening the latter's defensive attitude. In Burnham's view, failure to counteract Surinam moves with sufficient determination would encourage Venezuela to press its territorial claims more aggressively.

Stage set for armed conflict. Burnham, therefore, initially adopted a hard line. He was willing to discuss the border issue, but only if the Netherlands requested negotiations. As a pre-condition for discussions, moreover, he insisted that the Surinamese security forces be withdrawn from the disputed area and that the superiority of Guyana's claim to the area be acknowledged. As it became evident that the Dutch would not accept those terms, Burnham ordered the Guyana Defense Force to prepare to expel the Surinamese forces from the disputed area, by force if necessary. The stage was set for an armed conflict.

The Dutch, meanwhile, took a surprisingly calm attitude toward the entire affair, partially because they believed Burnham was bluffing and partially because of Pengel's position. Upon learning of Guyana's December action to expel the Surinamese hydrographic team, the Dutch merely asked for an explanation. Surinam's more aggressive stance, however, prompted the Dutch to propose a return to the status quo ante followed by negotiations on the substance of the dispute. Under the terms of the Dutch proposal Guyanese and Surinamese security forces would withdraw from the disputed area, civilians from the two countries would be permitted to resume their work in the area, and no more Guyanese workers would be deported from Surinam. Great Britain, strongly encouraged by the US, pressed the Netherlands to adopt a more conciliatory and active policy in order to avert violence. The Dutch, nevertheless, remained firm and waited for Guyana's formal reply to their proposal.

Burnham's initial private reaction, which he did not communicate directly to the Dutch, was highly negative. He was willing to withdraw Guyana's forces from the disputed area, but only after the Surinamese had departed. Should the Surinamese hydrographic team return, moreover, Burnham insisted that it be accompanied by Guyanese observers. Such a solution was unacceptable to the Dutch and the possibility of an armed conflict grew

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